

What Makes A Great Church, Part 5 - Romans 16:17 – November 17th, 2013

- Today's teaching will be part five of a series titled, "What Makes A Great Church."
- In the interest of time, and because today's teaching deals with false teaching in the church, I'll forgo an introduction listing the first nine.
- Actually, this teaching on false teachers is so crucial, I'm only taking verse seventeen, which has number 10 of what makes a great church.

10. Truth Teachers (Verse 17)

- v17 He urges them to watch out for and stay away from the divisive putting obstacles in their way, contrary to the teaching they had learned.
- Here, the Apostle Paul turns a corner going from greeting to warning, and in so doing begs them to keep themselves away from the wolves.
- The reason Paul shifts his focus from greeting friends to warning foes is, it rises to the level of importance for their protection and direction.
- Namely, to protect them from devastating danger of a wolf dressed like a sheep, and to direct them to a truth teacher who feeds the sheep.
- A truth so important that Paul says to get away from them as far as you can, and as quickly as you can. In other words, don't debate them.
- I find it most interesting how that conspicuously absent from the text is any mention of arguing with, or having patience with divisive people.
- This begs the question of why this warning is so blunt and even harsh. I submit this is like cancer spreading throughout the body of Christ.
- And, as with any cancer spreading throughout the body, it must be quickly cut out of the body, lest it spread so far that it becomes terminal.
- What's interesting about this cancer analogy is, cancer cells will be spreading proportionate to their dividing and attacking the healthy cells.

Here's how one cancer website explained it. "Cancerous cells divide uncontrollably. Usually they form a lump of tissue called a tumor. ...Things can get much worse, however, if the cancer becomes malignant and spreads. This happens when a single cancerous cell breaks away from the main tumor and starts growing and dividing elsewhere in the body. To do this, it must acquire more mutations that allow it to survive in other parts of the body. For a cancer cell to spread, it must be able to do two things that the normal cell it grew from could not: First, it must be able to leave its usual environment and travel through the blood or lymph system, a process called invasion. Second, when it arrives at its new location, it must be able to make new blood vessels grow around it and supply it with oxygen and nutrients, a process known as angiogenesis. The whole process of a tumor gaining new mutations as it divides and then spreading to other parts of the body is called metastasis."

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerandresearch/all-about-cancer/what-is-cancer/how-does-cancer-make-you-ill/>

- It's for this reason that scripture is replete with the blunt and harsh commands of the cutting out, and kicking out, of these divisive people.

Titus 3:9-11 NIV But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. (10) Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. (11) You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Acts 20:25-31 NIV "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. (26) Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. (27) For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. (28) Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. (29) I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (30) Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (31) So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

- I'm of the belief that Paul's emotional warning concerning these savage wolves in Acts 20 is evidence of how that Paul himself penned this.
- It's important to know that Paul would often dictate his epistles to a scribe, who would then record verbatim from the Apostle's dictation.
- The reason I mention this is that, in our text Romans 16:17, Paul seems to have written this himself to insure its validity, and authenticity.

Henry Morris - "It may well be that Paul took the pen and wrote these words himself . . . It is quite possible that Paul wrote these words, then passed the pen back to Tertius for a postscript. Something unusual happened at the end of this letter, and this is a very possible understanding of it."

This same thing happened at the end of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians in chapter 14, verse 18: (14) If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. (15) Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. (16) Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. (17) I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. (18) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

- Notice the authenticating and distinguishing mark that this was the Apostle Paul himself is a writing about having nothing to do with a rebel.
- Here's why I'm harping on this; the issue of marking and noting certain people in the church is so important, Paul writes with his own hand.
- Apparently, the early church, like today's church, were actually tolerating, rather than confronting these people, so as to protect God's flock.

Of this one commentator so aptly wrote, "Mad dogs are shot; infectious diseases are quarantined; but evil teachers who would divide to their destruction and draw away the saints with teaching *contrary to the doctrine* of Christ and His Apostles are everywhere tolerated!"

- I'll close this way, if you were to ask me why it is that Christians tolerate false doctrine from false teachers, I'd have to answer, their naïve.
- We'll see this, Lord willing, next week when we pick it up in verse eighteen where we'll be talking about being grounded in the Word of God.
- Suffice it to say, at least for today, it's not the grounded who tolerate this rather, it's the simple, and naïve, and even sincere, as we'll see.